

# UNITIL ESTIMATED BILLINGS

## FACTS

### CONSUMER RIGHTS

### FUEL ASSISTANCE INFORMATION

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Most frequently asked questions:

***Why is Unitil charging me an estimated amount on my bill?***

When a utility is unable to get a valid meter reading, an estimated bill is computed using kilowatt-hour data from the prior year. In the following month, when a valid meter reading is again available, the kilowatt-hour data is trued-up, the sum of the kilowatt-hours billed for two months should equal the actual meter reading.

***How do I dispute an estimated charge?***

Contact Unitil at (888) 301-7700 and try to resolve the complaint with them. You can request that the company check the meter.

***Can my service be disconnected without my permission?***

Yes, if you do not pay bills on time, if you fail to make a deposit payment, or if you began service under false or illegal pretenses such as using another person's name.

***Can a company disconnect my service while I am disputing the bill?***

As long as you pay undisputed portions of your bill, Unitil may not disconnect your service if you have a pending investigation with the Department of Public Utilities (DPU).

***How do I file a complaint against Unitil?***

Customers can file a written complaint with the DPU. Complaints may be filed through the DPU Consumer Division's online complaint form by email to [consumer.complaints@state.ma.us](mailto:consumer.complaints@state.ma.us); by mail to DPU, Consumer Division, One South Station, Suite 2, Boston, MA 02110; or by fax to (617) 478-2591. For more information you can call (617) 305-3575.

## **SHUT-OFF Consumer Rights**

No Shut-off if everyone in the household is over 65, unless the DPU gives permission. Companies rarely request this permission and most elder families are not shut off. Contact the Consumer Division and submit an elderly form.

You can avoid Shut-off if you set up a payment plan with a utility, which cannot shut off a customer willing to catch up on overdue payments over four months (1/4 of the amount due each month), while also paying current monthly bills. Utilities can offer longer plans, and some go for over a year. Never agree to a repayment plan faster than you can afford. Push for a reasonable plan and get help from the DPU Consumer Division (call 1-800-392-6066).

If you have been Shut-off, you can restore service by agreeing to a reasonable repayment plan with the utility. Again, push for an affordable plan and contact the Consumer Division if the utility does not cooperate.

Your landlord hasn't paid the utility bill? Tenants have shut off protections. If your landlord is responsible for the utility bill and has not paid it, tenants get 30 days notice of the right to pay a "projected bill" (an estimate of that tenant's share of the monthly bill). Even if all tenants do not pay this projected bill, the DPU, not the utility decides whether service should be shut off to the building. The DPU considers how much the tenants have paid, weather conditions, whether any tenants are seriously ill and tenants' ages. Involve the DPU as soon as possible.

### **Income-Eligible Shut-Off Rights:**

Household income must be at or below the dollar amounts in the table below, and the household must fill out a financial hardship form, which the utility company can provide. A Social Security number is not required (but should be provided if it exists), nor does immigration status matter.

#### **Income Limits for Eligibility (for winter 2008/2009):**

1 (person household):	\$27,876
2	\$36,454
3	\$45,031
4	\$53,608
5	\$62,186
6	\$70,763
7	\$72,371

No Shut-off if an infant under 12 months lives in the household. Any previous shut-off must be restored. You will need to show the child's age with a birth or baptismal certificate, or any other reasonable proof. Also submit a financial hardship form.

No Shut-off if someone seriously ill lives in the household. No gas or electric shut-off if anyone in the household (adult or child) has a serious illness. Any previous shut-off must also be restored. The serious illness can be: physical (such as asthma or pneumonia), mental (such as depression or bipolar disorder), short-term (the flu) or long-term (such as cancer). Send the company a serious illness letter from a doctor, nurse practitioner, physician assistant or the local Board of Health, and also submit a financial hardship form. A phone call from the doctor's office should work temporarily, but a letter must be sent later.

No Shut-off during the winter months. Gas and electric companies cannot terminate heat-related utilities from November 15 through March 15 (often extended through April). The customer must send a financial hardship form to the company.

### **Discounted Gas and Electric Rates and Budget Plans**

Massachusetts gas and electric utilities (except those operated by a city or town) offer a Low Income Discount Rate. Most families receiving Fuel Assistance should be enrolled automatically. Others who qualify should obtain an application from the utility and send

it back promptly or simply call the company. The utility should enroll the household right away, and not wait to verify income.

Utilities also offer level monthly payment plans. They estimate annual usage and divide that amount by 12 equal payments.

### **Reducing Your Home's Energy Bills**

Any household can get a free “energy audit” conducted by their utility company, listing ways to save on energy bills.

Income-eligible households can lower their energy bills by contacting their local weatherization agency. Call 1-800-632-8175 to find your local agency. The agency can replace inefficient heating systems and other appliances and better insulate an apartment or house.

### **Fuel Assistance Programs**

Fuel Assistance (called LIHEAP-Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program) makes direct payments (sometimes over \$1,000) for income-eligible households toward gas, electricity, oil, propane, kerosene or other heating bills. To apply, call 1-800-632-8175 to find your local fuel assistance agency. If heat is included in your rent, many eligible tenants can also receive fuel assistance. If heat has been shut off, the utility must accept a fuel assistance check of 25% of the amount overdue and turn the heat back on.

The Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP), often administered by your local fuel assistance agency.

Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT). Call 1-800-224-5124 or go to [www.masshousinginfo.org](http://www.masshousinginfo.org). The Good Neighbor Energy Fund provides a one-time grant to lower income people who do not qualify for Fuel Assistance. Contact the local Salvation Army or call 1-800-334-3047 (or 1-800-262-1320 in area code 413).

The Citizens Energy Corporation ([www.citizensenergy.com](http://www.citizensenergy.com)) offers a one-time delivery of oil at a discounted rate. Call 1-877-563-4645. It also operates a gas heat assistance program. Call 1-866-427-9918.

Catholic Charities, the United Way, the Salvation Army, Massachusetts Social Services agencies (dial 211 for information) your city or town, or other local organizations.